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## DISCUSSIONS.

## “THE MORAL ASPECTS OF SOCIALISM.”

WE will try briefly to put the readers of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS in possession of our point of view as regards Mr. Ball's article on “The Moral Aspects of Socialism.” He accuses us, in effect, of generalizing our idea of Socialism from the lower current conception of it, of ignoring what is highest and most significant in modern Socialism, and of lacking the discrimination that philosophy might be expected to exercise between different tendencies of the day.

Now on the matter of discrimination, I have said what I thought, and think, sufficient, in writings previous to “Aspects of the Social Problem,” especially in a paper read before the Fabian Society and published long ago in “Essays and Addresses.” I do not expect Mr. Ball to know this, but I cannot be expected to repeat myself forever. And in dealing with certain critical points, as for example the treatment of the family, and the condition of private property, we have in “Aspects” itself carefully distinguished what we hold to be the good and the bad movement in public control, and have pointed out that in certain stages they may even coincide for a time. But for the folly of hazarding a confusion of tongues, we could readily represent our own views, including the recognition of the family and private property, as the “only true Socialism,” and stigmatize the lower conception, which Mr. Ball agrees with us in deprecating, as a barbarous Individualism, which we fully believe it to be. But the copyright of names cannot thus be put aside; the result would be that we should be credited with views which we do not hold, and the underlying connection between a one-sided universalism and a one-sided particularism, which we take to be at the root of the tendency that we condemn, would escape detection. We, therefore, when referring to Socialism or Collectivism, mean by that term the views of recognized Socialist bodies in England, as expressed in their authorized publications and manifestoes. Mr. Ball's ideas are interesting, but are uninfluential in comparison with the body of popular literature which is disseminated, and the practical influence which is exercised, day by day among the wage-earning classes. And, moreover, so far as can be

judged from Mr. Ball's article, his ideas, though aiming high, have in them that fatal one-sidedness which inevitably, under the stress of active life, turns over into hitting low. We will illustrate this at starting, and need not return to it. He thinks because those who hold views like ours put character first as the condition of conditions, that we reduce material conditions to a negligible quantity. He thinks that I show an idealistic bias in saying that the sanitary worker does good more by educating the householder than by unstopping a drain. This I take as a noble corroboration of my views. That a true idealism is to be found in the drains and the slums and the daily worry of following up causation in the lives of the poor, I have always urged. But to find a simple practical precept, obvious to every sanitary worker and borne in on my own mind merely by detailed experience, held up as showing idealistic bias, is more than I should have hoped for. Does Mr. Ball not grasp the point that the man who lives in a house is the only man who can keep it clean, and who, if defects arise beyond his control, can give notice to the authority whose duty it is to see them amended? Granted that there must be such an authority; this, on my view, is obvious; but both its existence and its effectiveness are simply an expression of the determination of individuals to have the work done, and without this the whole concern is futile. If those who try to reform do not try in this spirit, they fail; \* the

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\* Mr. Ball insists on the case of the old lady who was saved from the incipient habit of drinking by a neighbor who boiled her kettle for her. This, he thinks, is a strong case against the view that character is primary,—the condition of conditions. But surely no one could understand me to deny that an appropriate act of kindness, done in the nick of time, and precisely adapted to an individual need, might save a soul,—the soul being precisely ready to be saved in that way. It is the bearing on the individual whole of life that we claim to be all important; obviously, in a certain sense, every detail is a circumstance, and all life is made up of details. These are truisms; the question is what lesson we learn broadly from such a case as that referred to. The managers of a great charitable building trust in one of our great cities have learnt that it is well to have a gas ring in poor tenants' rooms, so that the tired home-comer may get tea without lighting a fire. Here is Mr. Ball's circumstance, as a circumstance pure and simple, and quite right so far. But in some at least of the buildings of this trust, out of no selfish motives, for none can operate, but out of inexperience and reliance on carefully devised "circumstances," individual supervision and selection have been neglected. The effect of the surroundings has therefore not been what was hoped for as regards the character of the tenants, and grave complaints are brought against the buildings as a bad influence rather than a good one. There

desired improvement of material conditions is not effected, and the failure is due to the self-frustration of a "high" aim in consequence of one-sidedness. But it is not truly "high;" it is low, because abstractly or indolently held. To accuse us of minimizing material conditions because we insist on the only practical way of amending them, and to call us idealists because we have learned our lesson from hard experience, seems to me an inversion of the truth characteristic of the side which Mr. Ball espouses.

I do not absolutely conclude from this that Mr. Ball is very slightly acquainted with the polemical literature of his own side, for I fear that his ideas, well meant though I believe them to be, are too abstract to make him duly sensitive to the narrowness—perhaps the complementary narrowness—of that literature. But I cannot think that he would have written as he has, if he had been really familiar with the pressure of Socialistic forces in actual life, with the Fabian tracts and pamphlets, and, say, for example, with the "joint manifesto" of May 1, 1893. Let us begin with the latter, by which, practically, all English Socialists are bound until they repudiate it. It is signed in the most formal manner by the Joint Committee of the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society and the Hammersmith Socialist Society, among whose names are those of Mr. Sidney Webb, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and Mr. William Morris; and it is also signed separately by the secretaries of the three above-mentioned societies. Why Mr. Ball should speak of this as an "attempt at a joint Socialist manifesto," and hint that a Socialist would not attach much importance to the fact that the free maintenance of necessitous children appears in it, I am unable to conceive. Does he think that it does not matter what is said in penny pamphlets that go out under such auspices among the working classes? Is it also unimportant that the same manifesto says: "Thus we look to put an end forever to the wage-system, to sweep away all distinctions of class and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis"? When I discuss on what conditions as to possible saving and in-

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is no greed of property here, but a lavish expenditure of what is practically public money, under enlightened architectural advice, for the material advancement of the conditions under which the poor have to live. It is a serious case, and worth reflecting on. I do not think that any dwellings, however poor, managed on lines which have primary reference to character, have shown any tendency to produce such an effect. This is the sort of experience from which we have to learn.

vestment a wage-system fulfils the idea of private property, Mr. Ball tells me airily that Collectivism would be wholly based on a wage-system, and that I confound Socialism with Communism. In fact, I was making precisely the discrimination which he desires. I was considering what condition *any* possible wage-system must fulfil in order to meet the just ends of private property, and I said that my analysis applied to Collectivist system as to others. Mrs. Webb's "no margin" argument\* makes the discrimination necessary, and the manifesto shows that the view which Mr. Ball agrees with me in ruling out is the view of English Socialism, at least for propagandist purposes. I am aware of Mr. Webb's explanation of the phrase, "abolition of the wage-system;"† but the real question is here that of saving and investment, which both the entire anti-saving polemic and the accepted aim of Communism show to be excluded.

Let us now cast a glance at the Fabian tracts and current Socialism in the light of Mr. Ball's assertion : "The more scientific Socialist has never regarded the so-called Socialistic proposals as other than the herring across the track." The proposals in question are out-door relief, relief works, and old age pensions. Old age pensions are strongly advocated by Mr. Sidney Webb in Fabian Tract No. 17, the "Reform of the Poor Law;" and the diatribes to be found in this and other papers against the harshness of the New Poor Law, and Mr. Webb's hints as to the real views of the 1834 Report, must be held to refer in part to the policy of limiting out-relief. The relatively wise tendency of Mr. Webb's and Mr. Burns's views on relief works I am glad to recognize, though I think that the latter goes further in the direction of "making work" than he is himself aware; and the Independent Labor Party, of course, claim to be Socialist, and relief works are almost their main stalking-horse. But, all this being so, what becomes of selection and the standard of life? This would wholly depend on the principle adopted as to distribution of work and wages, and as to the responsibility of heads of families. And it is just on this point that no plan really exists; only it is plain that the best heads (see Mr. Webb in "True and False Socialism,"‡ Fabian Tract, No. 51) anticipate a continued defence of the standard wage

\* "The Co-operative Movement," p. 23. I understand Mrs. Webb to accept this reasoning, which she finds implicit in Owen's views.

† "Socialism—True and False," p. 17.

‡ Page 14.

through the Trades Union, and such organizations would give, in fact, the only chance of some selection being retained. Mr. Ball has with praiseworthy audacity held up as the essential principle of Socialism the one thing so absolutely and admittedly lacking to it that a scheme involving it is only hinted at with extreme timidity by the leaders. Unless the primary responsibility for maintenance falls on the head of the family, and in some way depends on his services, as it now does, selection is annihilated. Mr. Ball may say that in his view it ought so to fall, but we have seen that there exists not only no accepted plan of selection, but in the official manifesto a strong suggestion of Communism.

The difference between the higher views of Socialists and their working Socialism might be illustrated by the difference between the higher- and the lower-priced edition of the Fabian Essays. The former presents on the cover an allegorical design, which may be taken to mean the contest of Greed and Humanity. But the latter has a plainer device,—a gentleman in top-boots and old-fashioned hat, with “privilege” inscribed on his ample waistband, stands upon a ladder marked “Capital” that leads to fruit-bearing trees, aiming, with a revolver in either hand, at a pair of workingmen who are approaching to dislodge him. This disgusting presentation of class hatred has gone out by the thousand among workingmen. Does Mr. Ball suppose that we who come in actual contact with those affected by such a propaganda can be indifferent to its result, which some of us have traced in broken lives and miserable homes, and confine our attention to the academic suggestions of the chair? Only yesterday I talked with an able workingman, so earnest and conscientious that, though a convinced Socialist, he had given up a half-day’s work to come and hear a hostile criticism upon Socialism. And he fully and ardently believed that the family was a relic of barbarism which was doomed and ought to vanish. So the people are deceived.

Mr. Ball wants the idea that is relevant; so do we; and that is why we analyze the movement as it exists, and set over against it a more profound experience and a more solid ideal. And although discrimination is desirable, and we have done our part in discriminating, yet it must be remembered that the reason why the Socialist movement has so distinctly a lower side lies in the thin and superficial nature of its higher side. We are convinced by experience that whatever fine ideas may be exploited by the aca-

demic wing of the movement, its leaders and spokesmen as a whole have not yet acquired—I do not say they may not acquire it—any real or thorough vision of the possible good for industrial life, nor any real effective care—the care born of knowledge and sympathy—whether or not the classes whom the movement affects are elevated or brutalized by its impact. Mr. Ball, for whose ideals and purpose I have the highest respect, has himself, it is obvious, no conception whatever of the weighty issues at stake, for the population of our large towns, in the Socialist propaganda as it practically exists. But we, who know, must act upon our knowledge.\*

There is one other point to which I am bound to refer. Mr. Ball drags into his criticism the name of the Charity Organization Society, as if this reference were an adequate characterization of our views. But our book is largely theoretical, and deals with many topics on which the Charity Organization Society, whose aims are practical, has never formulated an opinion. A book, I submit, ought to be dealt with on its own merits, and not by reference to an institution with which its authors are known to be connected, especially where it is one the mention of which is certain to excite all sorts of ignorant prejudices. I go wholly with the Charity Organization Society, but I know that few outsiders have any idea of what its real practice is, and I know also that its publications do not contain explicit theories of the kind which we have ventured to put forward. If these theories are worth reviewing, they are worth studying for their own sake, which Mr. Ball shows no trace of having done; and I cannot help thinking that they would contribute to ending the wretched war of catchwords and party shibboleths like Socialism and Individualism.

BERNARD BOSANQUET.

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\* As illustrating the assistance given by organized Socialism, whatever its "inner" convictions, to a mischievous local propaganda, I may mention a handbill, now before me, announcing a public meeting at a well-known Radical club in my district of London, "calling upon the Government to grant to all Educational Authorities Power to organize the Maintenance of Necessitous School Children." The chairman is a local Guardian, a notorious out-relief man. Among the speakers announced are two members of the Social Democratic Federation, one member of the Independent Labor party, and one member of the Fabian Society.—B. B., May 7, 1896.

I do not know what right Mr. Ball has to state that I consider it "superficial and immoral" to criticise any system. I have certainly never said so, and most of my writing so far has consisted in pointing out defects in the working of our present industrial and social organization. That I look for a cure in the moralization of the individual rather than in the machinery of a "popular control of industry" is another matter. What I *do* regard as superficial and immoral are the particular methods of handling facts and figures, and of gaining popularity, adopted by the Socialist Propagandists. This is what I have explained in the article referred to by Mr. Ball. As for my poor old spinster, it has been most amusing to see how our opponents have seized upon her as the salient weak point in our arguments, until I am almost tempted to ask whether under the Socialist *régime* there will be a special department for boiling kettles for poor old women, and so obviating the necessity for neighbourly kindness.

HELEN BOSANQUET

LONDON.

(née Dendy).

DIRECT LEGISLATION DEFENDED.

MR. A. LAWRENCE LOWELL had an article in THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS for October, 1895 (vol. vi., pp. 51-63), attacking Direct Legislation—the Initiative and the Referendum—argumentatively and in its actual use in Switzerland. In my opinion his logic is faulty, and after careful investigation, including statements from authorities on the ground, I am sure that many of his facts are only half-truths.

As an illustration of Mr. Lowell's faulty logic, he refuses to class the control of the liquor traffic by local option, so common in this country, as a species of the Referendum. He says: "It becomes a law without regard to their wishes, and the question of its application in any district is decided solely by the voters of that district. Such a system is, therefore, only a method of local self-government." The last statement is correct, and that is just what Direct Legislation is, "a method of local self-government." But how Mr. Lowell can say, "it becomes a law without regard to their wishes," when it can be applied or not as the voters wish, I cannot see. The latter part contradicts the first. The Grand Council of the Canton of Berne passes a proposed law, but it cannot go into effect until a majority of the voters in Berne have voted in favor of it. This is the obligatory referendum, where all laws have to be